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QUINTILIAN AGAIN

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In the February number of this *Journal* a most interesting and instructive paper was printed on the subject "An Ancient Schoolmaster's Message to the Present-Day Teachers." I agree so thoroughly with the greater part of what Mr. Bennett said that I regret all the more his apparent misinterpretation of a certain very important passage: important, because on it Mr. Bennett has constructed an eloquent criticism of American teaching during the last twenty years.

He quotes Quintilian, Book I, chap. 4, section 22: "Nomina declinare et verba imprimis pueri sciunt, neque enim aliter pervenire ad intellectum sequentium possunt; etc." With this text he proceeds:

Has not Quintilian admirably diagnosed the difficulty that has beset us here in America for the last score of years? Have we not been attempting to make pupils understand continuous Latin before mastering the elements that compose it? Have we not been guilty of an ostentatious haste, beginning where we ought to end? . . . Certainly, if to Roman boys such grammatical study was a necessary preliminary to an effective mastery of their native tongue, to modern boys the necessity is *a fortiori* vastly greater. As to the educative value of grammar in general, Quintilian boldly vindicates it from being the dry and profitless study that it is often alleged to be."

In this last sentence, Mr. Bennett writes as if his own definition of grammar and Quintilian's of "grammaticæ" were identical, whereas they are radically different. For Mr. Bennett, grammar is a science, of which, in the case of Latin, he can present the essential facts in some 250 pages; for Quintilian, grammar consisted of two parts, the art of speaking and writing ("recte loquendi scientia, scribendi ratio"), and interpretation of the poets, along with textual and literary criticism ("poetarum enarratio, emendata lectio, iudicium"). This point of definition may gain in clarity if we first

compare the writings of the early Humanists with Quintilian; they agree closely. In the subsequent centuries, men have laid increasing stress on the formal and deductive side of the concept, so that we have reached our present point of view.

This leads to the second phrase in Mr. Bennett's commentary which seems to me wholly unjustified by Quintilian's text. Where does Quintilian say that "pupils should master the elements that compose continuous Latin" before they be made to understand continuous Latin? Nowhere: on the contrary, both Quintilian and common-sense enforce the simple truth—so widely known, so widely disregarded—that Roman boys did in very fact understand "continuous Latin" before they made a "determined, decisive attack on the paradigms." Were Roman boys, unlike all others, dumb, "*expertes sermonis*," until they were dragged to school by the pedagogue? Probably not. If we examine Quintilian a little more carefully, we shall be able to make out his scheme for elementary instruction in foreign languages.

In the first place, he draws no distinction whatever between the learning of Latin and of Greek. Notice his words (Book VIII, 4, 1): "*Primus in eo qui scribendi legendique adeptus erit facultatem, grammaticis est locus. Nec refert, de Graeco an de Latino loquar, quanquam Graecum esse priorem placet. Utrique eadem via est.*" It is obvious that "beginning Greek first" refers to systematic study. He gives his reasons in Book I, 1, 12. "*A sermone Graeco puerum incipere malo, quia Latinum, qui pluribus in usu est, vel nobis nolentibus perhibet; simul quia disciplinis quoque Graecis prius instituendus est, unde et nostrae fluxerunt.*" But the point is, that Greek, a foreign language, is to be learned in exactly the same way as Latin, the native tongue. This is Quintilian's solution of the "burning problem" of the teaching of elementary Latin and Greek. He insists on the training of the ear as well as of the eye. One of the salient features of Quintilian's discipline is the attention paid to good habits of speech from infancy. "*Ante omnia ne sit vitiosus sermo nutricibus. . . . Has primum audiet puer, harum verba effingere imitando conabitur.*"

If we remember this, it is easy to see the true bearing and importance of his advice about grinding gerunds. Up to a certain point,

the child learns by imitation and the ear only. He knows, comparatively speaking, a good deal of Latin. But his knowledge needs to be systematized; to be rendered more compact and reasonable to his growing intelligence; "ergo," says Quintilian, "nomina declinare et verba imprimis pueri sciant."

Turn to the eighth chapter of Book I: we see clearly how important oral work continued to be. The boys must learn to read aloud well ("lectio"); and their vocabulary is to be increased by hearing the master read passages aloud with some explanation (Book I, 8, 15). Side by side with oral we find written work required. The fables of Aesop had to be retold and paraphrased, first orally, then in writing. Later, simple themes had to be written, "ad augendam eloquentiam." This sort of free composition played a large part in rhetorical training. Clearness was the indispensable quality of these essays. Their minds were stored with passages from the best authors, which, once learned by heart, formed an inexhaustible treasury.

Why is it that we have drifted so far from this human and direct method of teaching Latin and Greek? If we desire to conserve in the United States the form and essence of liberal education, we must by our instruction make Greek and Latin live again in the minds of our pupils. Two thousand word vocabularies and mere paradigm learning will not accomplish our purpose. Nor is the intelligent use of oral method an untried innovation; Roman teachers taught this way, and their boys learned the Greek language and absorbed its culture; Renaissance teachers taught this way, and rescued the western world from the inhuman lethargy which followed the loss of Greek. Even today, we are not without examples of the success of oral methods. Look at the Reform-Gymnasien in Germany; and study the work of such English schools as the Perse Grammar School of Cambridge. Much of the opposition to the study of the classics is due to the fact that, as they are now taught in most of our schools, six or seven years of work are not attended by any proportionate attainment. This loss of time is avoidable; for an average boy can learn in a year sufficient Greek to read the *Apology* of Socrates, and that too in lessons of three-quarters of an hour per day. Language, so studied, develops not only the memory and the logical faculties, but also the imagination. "Reading maketh a Full Man; Conference

a Ready Man; and Writing an Exact Man.” I advocate reading and conference; yet I would not diminish the importance of writing. A careful study of Quintilian and of such Humanists as Maffeo Vegio and Vittorino da Feltre would go far to dissipate any prejudice against their methods and ideals in education. Let us, as Professor Mahaffy urges, “teach all languages as living vehicles of human expression.”